

Time for Change: An Evaluation into this Pilot Service for Vulnerable Young Women aged 14-18 years at High Risk of Secure Care or Custody

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Summary of Findings: Raising Questions for Practice, Service Provision and Policy Development

1. Introduction

Time for Change is a gender-specific project provided by the Up-2-Us organisation. The project began its pilot year in May 2010 and set out to offer a community based alternative to secure accommodation and/or custody for young women aged between 14 and 18 years old, deemed to be vulnerable and at high risk of further involvement with offending and related behaviour. The pilot project received central government funding and is set within the current youth justice policy landscape and service provision, where arguably there has been a lack of female specific provision dedicated to addressing the complex needs of young women whilst balancing the range of risks posed, to and from this relatively small, but particularly vulnerable social group within the youth justice sector in Scotland. From the outset the Project was committed to sustained evaluation of its objectives, service provision and practice in order to inform develop effective practice and inform future service provision.

The University of Glasgow was commissioned by the Project to evaluate their practice and provision by exploring the ways in which services are delivered and subsequently experienced by service users and involved stakeholders, assessing how effective these interventions are in minimising the risk of secure care or custody being imposed. Juxtaposed to this practice focused evaluation, an exploration of the offending-related concerns of those young women referred to the agency was also undertaken to further develop our existing knowledge and practice base and inform the Evaluation.

2. The Evaluation: Key Objectives

The Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research at the University of Glasgow undertook a 12 month research evaluation into the nature of service provision offered to the targeted group of young women involved within some kind of offending or anti-social behaviour and at significant risk of high tariff statutory measures being taken against them.

The Evaluation sought out to understand how this group of young women could be effectively supported by this community based alternative to secure care or custody, thereby minimising risks of further offending and deeper entanglement within the youth and/or adult justice systems. The Evaluation focused upon:

- The Project's principal practice approach and organisational ethos of providing person-centred, individualised and relationship based support and assistance, seeking to identify evidenced informed practice with this complex client/offender group.
- Assessing the effectiveness of this gender-specific community based intensive support - noting many if not all, with significant social and personal difficulties and with previous experiences of statutory intervention throughout their childhood and adolescence
- implications for policy, practice and service development across children and families, youth justice and adult criminal justice contexts

2.1 Methodological Approach

To meet the Evaluation's objectives, a qualitative approach to gathering data was taken, alongside statistical analysis of the referral data. To provide a holistic understanding, we adopted a multi- tiered approach to gathering data, consisting of:

- 14 Interviews with Young Women
- 13 interviews with Stakeholders
- 2 X 6 interviews with TfC Workers (Initial and Follow Up)
- Documentary analysis of young women's case records held by TfC

This approach proved fruitful in allowing comprehensive thematic analysis of:

- the ways in which the Project engages with and supports young women
- how this support is experienced by young women, what kinds of meaning they attach to it and the effect upon their circumstances
- stakeholder's views of the support available, means of the delivery and the impact upon young women's circumstances in the short and, potentially, longer term
- the view from the Project's own workers, identifying creative practice approaches, evidence informed practice and the extent of human resources available to draw upon within the project team itself

In respect to ethical concerns the research was conducted in accordance with the University of Glasgow's ethical guidelines and following their Ethical Committee's approval. Confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary informed consent were particularly relevant to all three sample groups, but the potential sensitivity of the research with respect to young women in particular, was recognised and subsequent actions taken to ensure young women fully understood their right not to participate or

to withdraw from the process alongside our commitment to anonymity and to confidentiality, noting specific, standard limitations.

3. Key Findings

Overall, analysis of documentary evidence in the form case files alongside the three sample groups' interview data demonstrate positive significant, substantive and tangible evidence of effective interventions within young women's lives, in the short term, but with considerable potential for longer term stability and community re-integration. Data also evidences the diversity of the client group, noting the range of offending behaviour, experience of imprisonment and secure care and the array of offending-related difficulties that young women require support to be able to overcome these emotional, familial, economic and social obstacles.

The Evaluation found Time for Change's service provision in general to be a positive intervention within young women's lives, providing individually tailored support plans premised upon need and mediated by risks posed and offering various kinds of support delivered via appropriate, evidenced based practice models. Some of the key findings of the Evaluation are:

- The **commitment to person-centred practice has been evidenced throughout** the various aspects of evaluation and there is consistent evidence of holistic, needs-led support which focuses at the core of the support plan, upon each young woman's specific circumstances -family history, experience of trauma, abuse or neglect, nature of offending behaviour, use of statutory measures, accommodation, peer groups, psychological well being, substance misuse, as examples - working alongside referrers and other agencies in producing a structured support plan which addresses young women's emotional, social and practical needs but also seeks to challenge young women's offending behaviour and related attitudes and anti-social perceptions.
- Within practice and organisational ethos, there is a clear emphasis upon key principles of **person-centred theory, where the relationship between practitioner and service user is understood to be a very significant factor in achieving positive change**, indeed evidence has suggested that where these relationships are forged genuinely, with warmth and care and without judgement or stereotypical assumptions, the **opportunity for transformative change is considerable** (see Mearns and Thorne 2006). There is evidence, in a number of cases, to suggest this to be possible over a longer period of involvement with the Project.
- Certain practice approaches are deployed in response to specific needs and circumstances of each young woman and their presenting problems, and a **range of social work practice models are deployed, such as, crisis intervention, solution focused and task centred practice skills**. Importantly though, these models are drawn **upon within the context of the overarching person centred approach** and within a positively **developing 'helping' relationship** between young women and workers.

- Young women's perceptions of the worker-service user relationship were **universally positive**, whilst many reported they initially felt apprehensive of such intensive support or of a new worker being introduced, as the relationships with workers developed, young **women increasingly felt able to receive and importantly, actively seek out emotional support and practical assistance** from their workers and the organisation more generally.
- Both young women and stakeholders deeply **valued the 'wraparound' nature of provision available**. Evidence suggests that as young women develop a relationship with the organisation and engage with focused one to one work, they become able to identify 'risky' situations or feelings, and be able to effectively utilise the 24 hour out of hours helpline to assist them to manage such a situation that has potential for either self harm or offending behaviour.
- Young women report **previous experience of various kinds of interventions**, initially premised upon welfare grounds and often via statutory measures via the Children's Hearing System, however **young women's perception of TfC support was different** to other kinds of agency support, particularly statutory social work services. Some of the project's key practice approaches can be effectively illustrated by considering the different role that TfC's plays compared to the role of statutory provision, these include:
 - The level and **context of face to face contacts** between workers and young women – informal, active, external, significant duration, priority focused, 'space' (emotional, relationship, psychological, organisational commitment to providing such space and time) made for therapeutic focused work, 'space' made for rapport building activities and self esteem and confidence building activities and interactions.
 - **Availability, flexibility and accessibility of workers** – contacts maintained up to 7 days per week via face to face, telephone, text, prisoner email, prison visits, letters.
 - **Knowledge of the Project's other staff** members – developing bond with the community organisation, adding another worker to respond to specific elements of the support plan to match worker's skill base to young women's needs; awareness of who may answer an out of hours crisis call.
 - **Provision of practical support and encouragement** – support in complying with community disposals, emergency accommodation, immediate response to crisis, accessing community initiatives, learning opportunities, family/peer relationships, budgeting, maintaining links to family whilst in prison, explaining the court process and legal implications, encouragement and assistance to build social capital and community ties.

- Recognised as quite **an unusual kind of provision within a justice context** –praise focused, strengths and capacity emphasised, highly intensive active contacts, wide array of support tasks undertaken yet an underlying focus upon challenging offending behaviour and developing young women’s understanding of key catalysts for offending and self harming behaviour.
- Evidence suggests that since TfC Involvement began, **young women being actively supported, have substantially reduced their contact with the police and court system** (in relation to any new charges), **with clear declines in the rate of arrest, positive changes in patterns of offending resulting in significantly lower number of charges being received** and therefore most have not spent further time within custody, evidencing a significant impact of the project’s intensive support.
- TfC can respond to referrals very quickly, particularly when intensive intervention is required in extremely high risk situations. In certain cases, this involvement has played a key role in diversion from secure care or custody. As the project has established itself, there **is growing evidence of sentencers taking account** of TfC’s intensive support when considering custodial sentences for young women, there is recent evidence which suggest a number of young women supported by TfC who have presented at court for sentencing have received alternatives to custody or avoided being held on remand, at least partly, and in some cases quite significantly, due to the intensive, structured high frequency of contact and engagement provided by TfC to such young women. As the project grow and develops, and longer term positive results become available, it is likely that key stakeholders and sentencers will become increasingly aware of the benefits of TfC support, for young women themselves, and for society itself in reducing social harms and its costs upon communities.

4. Considering implications for Practice and Policy

After analysing the practice, objectives and client group of TfC, time must now be taken to comprehensively consider implications of the Evaluation’s findings for service provision, the client group needs and risks, nature of practice approaches adopted and how these can be utilised effectively and efficiently. The following key issues are provided below to stimulate such debate, promoting the practice of knowledge exchange, equally valuing practitioners experiences on the ground with those of strategists and theorists ultimately encouraging a multi-disciplinary borders-crossing dialogue between frontline practitioners, service managers, policy-makers, academics and researchers within and associated to the Scottish youth justice sector, specifically as it relates to young women.

- The need for gender specific support as part of wider youth justice remit – raises issues around feasibility, innovative use and investment of resources to significantly increase longer term positive outcomes which reduce social harms and costs to communities, as well as to specific client groups, whilst increasing active citizenship via pro-social behaviours.

- What kind of role can (or should) a genuine person centred practice (PCP) approach play in working with female, and potentially male, offender client groups. TfC have made vast efforts to embed the principles of Carl Rogers' person centred therapeutic approach into their practice, and our findings clearly illustrate this to be one of the central positive factors in forming effective working relationships which is another key factor in promoting change – research has found that the quality of the working relationship, in various contexts, is a primary factor in provoking and sustaining personal change. However, there may well be ideological obstacles to be addressed in drawing upon PCP within a statutory criminal/youth justice context, - of course alongside utilisation of other relevant practice approaches –including addressing offending and associated behaviours and attitudes - and these issues require to be discussed, debated and assessed, and part of this may involve accessing various existing evidence which demonstrate how effective such an approach can be in within various similar settings to criminal justice and in reducing risks of re-offending and assisting young women/offenders to develop self worth, social capital and societal investment, which constitute key markers for desistance.
- Aligned to forthcoming Scottish policy approach to youth justice across the country - the 'Whole System Approach' – consideration of where gender specific provision can 'fit' within this proposed policy landscape, as well as specific practice approaches and the nature of intensive support services which offer a holistic 'wraparound' needs led, risk balanced approach.
- There are certainly many important issues to be discussed around available resources for such intensive provision at point of delivery – there are clearly economic implications in developing service provision similar to TfC, but there are also innovative ways in which to outsource, draw upon and utilise existing resources in a new and creative way. Discussions and decisions must be made based upon longer term gains, longer term positive outcomes, as it is not possible to measure outcomes effectively over a relatively short period of time, especially when working with young women with complex high levels of emotional, psychological, educational, social, mental health, offending related needs/concerns with histories of significant familial difficulties, social work interventions that are often experienced negatively, including being accommodated. Issues around best value, best practice, cost-efficiency must be part of the planning process, but we also need this to be mediated by consideration of the potentially significant public sector savings over time if we, within this sector can provide an earlier effective and 'joined-up' intervention within young women's lives, then these longer term gains in terms of potential costs to health sector, justice and penal system and welfare system will be vastly reduced, over time. It seems now that brave decisions must be made, based upon evidence and taking account of users' views and those frontline workers who work with them. Of course, there are potential benefits to future generation, to the children of these young women who futures remain uncertain as yet for many, but indicators could suggest that this cycle of poor parenting, low levels of educational engagement and mental

health difficulties, as examples, could for many, continue into another generation of anti social, offending related behaviours.

- Recognition of the different kinds of needs of younger women (for example those aged 15 year old) in comparison to the different needs of older group of women (15.5 – 19yrs or even up to 21 years). The Evaluation found significant differences in the ways in which young women engage with the service and the attitude to toward services and their anti social behaviour and offending related behaviour. Clearly these younger adolescents are at a different developmental stage to their over 16 year old counterparts and do not yet have the hugely negative experiences which may of the older group do. Many in this group are not necessary focused on changing their behaviour, and therefore more reluctant to meaningful engage. Furthermore, as this group remain legally classified as ‘children in need’, there is an automatic statutory response, and often these girls have a plethora of agencies/ professionals involved within their lives.

The needs of this younger group are often very different to those of the older group, who are far more likely to have low levels of both formal or informal support, with supervision orders often having been discharged at aged 16 despite ongoing significant welfare and justice concerns, it very much appears that there a vast gap in service provision exists for those young women between aged 15.5yrs and 18 yrs, and most probably for those young women up to the age of 21 years due to the dearth in appropriate service provision for this group. Indeed, decisions must be made by the Project about the specific targeted group of women , and certainly an increase to the age of 19, at least, is strongly recommended as this would allow those older young women, a greater opportunity to engage within effective and sustainable interventions. Evidence suggests that these older young women tend to have greater insight into their circumstances and behaviour, and many have reported how important TfC has been in assisting them to work through various difficulties, realise the triggers to their offending or anti social behaviours and more generally, in offering a caring, warm supportive worker and organisation who they feel able to actively seek help from –which in itself has often been a significant change in behaviour and attitude toward receiving assistance.

Furthermore, this older group are already within the transition into adulthood, with all the challenges this brings, and seriously compounded by the difficult personal and familial circumstances such as lack of positive familial involvement which is a significant concern for many of the TfC older young women who often lack positive, meaningful or supportive familial or other informal networks. Despite the fact most of these young women have experience of being a ‘looked after ad accommodated child’, including time within secure care for some, by the age of 16 or 17 many find themselves without formal support systems such as throughcare or aftercare provision. These young women’s needs are high and highly complex, often with deeply rooted difficulties which require to be addressed in partnership with each woman, at their own pace, whilst balancing the risks of re-offending and

related issues. Young women also require practical and welfare support in order to make positive transitions and move toward change, such as requiring a safe place to live, particularly when being released from custody or secure care, financial, employment and educational assistance, accessing appropriate community services and support to continue to forge positive self identities and for some, support to develop better relationships with family.

- Consideration must also be given to transitions from intensive support services such as TfC and Follow On supports in the community in which to ensure young women are seamlessly supported in building upon the work undertaken with TfC, with appropriate endings, but with the most appropriate follow on support, of less intensity, but in assisting and empowering young women to for example, manage a tenancy, maintain her commitment to community integration, pro-social behaviour and engagement with other kinds of support that offer structure, routine, and the opportunity to develop women's sense of self worth in all areas - from managing emotions and relationships to employment skill building and ceasing any abuse of substances. Further work is required to identify relevant agencies from various sectors and to co-ordinate a consistent and sustainable plan to enable positive, transitional endings for those young women no longer requiring such an intensive support resource. However, these endings must be well planned for in advance, be at the most appropriate time and with links made in a co-ordinated way with relevant supports when she begins her new phase of further building of social capital, maintaining a stable and pro active lifestyle within her community. Otherwise, it is possible, indeed if not likely, that many would return to old negative behaviours, and once again feel a sense of abandonment, disappointment and distrust from helping or welfare agencies which may lead to a return to previous patterns of anti social or offending behaviour, social exclusion and stigmatisation.